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AUTHOR Wares, Margaret Bonds
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reading professional in the post high school institution offering technical curricula. The status and role of the reading professional were researched by ascertaining his opinions and those of his dean of instruction. One hundred two-year colleges were randomly selected from "Ferguson's Guide to Two Year College Programs for Technicians and Specialists". Identical opinionnaires were sent to the reading specialists and deans. An information sheet was attached to the reading specialists' opinionnaire. The replies were compiled by item to show opinions on eleven specific questions. Tables showing agreement or disagreement by percentage of reading specialists and deans on these questions are included. (Author/SW)

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The Reading Profession -

A Status Report

By

Margaret Bonds Wares

Nashville, Tennessee

JC 740 122

presented at the annual convention

of

The Western College Reading Association

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The Reading Profession - a Status Report

A survey by Lowe (1968) concludes that college reading and study skills services have been in existance since the closing years of the ninetheenth century. (Ref. 3) Ahrendt (1971) suggests that only in recent years has a demand for these programs increased measurably. (Ref. 1) Maxwell (1970) has pointed out the increased demand for reading professionals on the college level, weakness in training for these people and the high turnover rate of college reading specialists. (Ref. 4)

Colvin (1971) has discussed the lack of status and acceptance of reading programs on the college level. He suggested that the organization, administration, testing, diagnosis, methods of instruction, selection and use of materials, and the evaluation of these programs

All flow from the philosophical outlook of the college adminstration and attitudes of the college faculty. (Ref. 2)

In preliminary tabulation of this study, 20% of the reading specialists responded in agreement to the statement: "If the reading specialists position as it now stands were to cease to exist, it would no affect our college greatly." 10% of the deans who responded also agreed.

It was the purpose of this study to investigate the reading professional in the post high school institution that offers technical curricula. His status and his role were researched both by ascertaining his own opinions and also those of his dean of instruction.

One hundred two-year colleges were randomly selected from Ferguson's Guide to Two Year College Programs for Technicians and Specialists. To the deans of instruction and the reading specialists of these hundred colleges, identical opinionnaires were sent. Attached to the reading specialists' opinionnaire was an information sheet asking for specific information on their position in the college.

the replies, 46 from reading specialists and 48 from deans of instruction, were compiled by item to show how the reading specialists felt about the eleven specific items and how the deans saw their reading professionals. These results will be reported in simple percentages by item with RMS tables for composit deand and reading specialists to illustrate agreement or disagreement. An accompanying RMS table will be included for each question showing what differences, if any, exist between the composit population and the subpopulation which was composed of the 60 opinionnaires from the 30 colleges that both deans and reading specialists responded.

The status related questionnaire were compiled to show where the reading specialists were in so far as salary, staff, office space and other status related items.

Figure I

Questionnaire for Reading Specialists

Questionnaire

1. What is your official title? _____

2. Please circle the highest degree you hold?
   a) associate b) bachelors c) masters d) Ed Specialist e) doctorate

3. Do you have a private office? yes_____ no _____

4. How much secretarial assistance do you have?
   a) full time secretary b) half or quarter time secretary c) use of superior's secretary d) student worker secretary e) no secretarial assistance

5. How many hours comprise your work week at school?
   a) 20 b) 40 c) 50 d) more than 50

6. Please indicate your current annual salary:
   a) 7,000-9,000 b) 9,000-12,000 c) 12,500-15,000 d) above 15,000

7. How many persons comprise your total reading department staff?
   a) 1 b) 2-4 c) 4-6 d) more than 6

The questionnaire for the reading professional were constructed to give a composit picture of the teacher in the field. From this we learned that the majority of reading teachers who responded to the questionnaire held a masters degree, with the remainder holding either a bachelors or an education Specialist and five of the 46 responding holding the doctorate. Twenty nine of the 46 had private offices.

Secretarial assistance, which is so essential to the innovative teaching of reading, was not provided in many incidences. Of the 46 respondants, 15 had student secretaries, 11 had no secretarial assistance,

5 had full time secretaries, 5 had half or quarter time secretaries and 9 had occasional use of the secretarial staff of their superior.

Of the respondants, 27 worked twenty hours a week and nine worked 50 hours or more at school each week.

Salary was reported to be $9,000 to $12,000 for 18 respondants, while 15 reported their salary to be above $15,000 per year.

Personnel in the reading programs was limited. 18 respondants said that only one person worked in the reading program, 19 reported a staff of 2 to 4 and the remainder of the departments being comprised of 4 of more.

Of the reading specialists whose deans also responded to the questionnaire there is a slight difference in responses. Those schools where the deans and the reading specialists responded, salaries of reading specialists were slightly higher and proportionally more reading specialists worked 50 hours a week or more. This is by no means significant statistically, but it does indicate that when deans and reading specialists respond, there is an evidence of harder work by reading people and greater confidence in them from their deans.

Five items on the opinionnaire were designed to ascertain the role of the Reading Professional as reported by deans and the Reading Professional themselves. In response to the statement "The reading specialists role in our school is primarily that of remediationist for students with substandard skills" 16% of the reading people strongly agreed, 17% of the deans strongly agreed. 53% of the reading people agreed as did 43% of the deans 23% of the reading people disagreed 11% of the deans did, and 11% of the deans strongly disagreed as did 7% of the reading people.

More than half of the reading people saw their job in this narrow light. Surely the deans have more confidence in their reading specialist ability than the reading specialist had in themselves.

Table 1

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
16%	Strongly Agree	17%	16.5%	16.8%
53%	Agree	43%	48.2%	48%
23%	Disagree	28%	25.6%	27%
7%	Strongly Disagree	11%	13.7%	6%

The reading specialist's role in our school is primarily that of remediator for students with substandard skills.

One of the most painful things to realize and accept is that ones job exists because there is a law or tradition that dictates that a remediationist be on payroll. In response to the statement, "One of the purposes we have a reading specialist in our college is to satisfy state requirements that we have one." The deans who responded to this question were emphatic. 76% strongly disagreed and 24% disagreed. On the other hand the reading professionals were not so sure. 60% strongly disagreed, 28% disagreed but 8% agreed and 5% strongly so. If this is an expected index of dissatisfaction it is not anything to worry about - however if it is a status quo that 13% of our profession feels un-need - we should reevaluate our profession.

Table 2

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
5%	Strongly Agree	0		
8%	Agree	0		
28%	Disagree	24%	26%	21.5%
60%	Strongly Disagree	76%	68.4%	58%

One of the purposes we have a reading specialist in our college is to satisfy the state requirements that we have one.

At the WCRA Conference in Reno, one of the officers was overheard saying, "Look around for the people who appear as if they need to be needed - they are the reading professionals." In so far as use of the reading specialist for the good of the college at large is concerned, two statements were made on the opinionnaire to scale the importance of the reading professional in so far as serving the other professionals in the institutions are concerned. In response to the question, "Part of the reading specialist's job should be helping other faculty members to know how to teach reading in course content." 46% of the deans agreed, 33% strongly agreed. 40% of the reading professionals strongly agreed, 42% agreed. Neither group strongly disagreed, but 21% of the deans and 18% of the reading professionals disagreed.

Table 3

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
29%	Strongly Agree	13%	21%	23%
66%	Agree	55%	60.7%	51%
5%	Disagree	33%	23%	23.7%
	Strongly Disagree	2%	0	0

Part of the reading specialist job should be helping other faculty members to know how to teach reading in the course content.

Consider this in comparison with the responses to this item, "The reading specialist is used as a curriculum consultant through running readability formulae on textbooks considered for adoption." 30% of the deans and 43% of the reading specialists agreed while 11% of the deans and 12% of the reading professionals strongly agreed. 48% of the deans disagreed with the statement while only 26% of the reading people indicated a similar response. This indicates two things. First the reading professional stands ready to be of assistance to his colleagues, but may not be encouraged to do so. Secondly, this question is one reflecting status quo, because the former one said <u>should</u> but this one was worded <u>is</u>. This may indicate that deans recognize the need for reading specialist professional services for colleagues, but have not seen evidence of such services being rendered.

Table 4

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
12%	Strongly Agree	11%	11.5%	13.3%
43%	Agree	30%	37%	28%
26%	Disagree	48%	38.6%	38.8%
19%	Strongly Disagree	11%	15.5%	13%

The reading specialist is used as a curriculum consultant through running readability formulae on textbooks considered for adoption.

The last function of the reading professional explored was that of ombudsman. Because of the close personal contact the reading teacher has with students, many times he is placed in the position of go-between for students and faculty. Tutorial services, counseling services many other personal services are secured for various students by the reading professional. In response to the statement, "The main function of our reading specialist is that of ombudsman." 23% of the reading specialists agreed as compared with only 9% of the deans. This suggests only that the deans are not aware of how much time a reading person spends trying to assist students in matters not strictly instructional. This is no reflection upon anyone, rather it is to suggest that a reading teacher does not just teach reading.

Table 5

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
37%	Strongly Agree	44%	40%	41.5%
44%	Agree	38%	41%	34%
12%	Disagree	14%	45%	27%
34%	Strongly Disagree	37%	35%	34%

The main function of our reading specialist is that of ombudsman.

The Existance of a Reading Program

Three items on the opinionnaire were designed to discover attitudes about the existance of reading laboratories and reading instruction on a college level.

In response to the statement, "Assuming that we had neither facility and we had unencumbered funds to build tennis courts or equip a reading laboratory we would open a reading laboratory." 44% of the deans strongly agree as did 37% of the reading specialists. 44% of the reading specialists and 38% of the deans agreed. 19% of the reading specialists disagreed, with 7% disagreeing strongly and 18% of the deans disagreeing, 4% strongly so.

Table 6

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
37%	Strongly Agree	44%	40%	41.5%
44%	Agree	38%	41%	34%
12%	Disagree	14%	13%	6%
7%	Strongly Disagree	4%	5.7%	7%

Assuming that we had neither facility and we had unencumbered funds to either build tennis courts of equip a reading laboratory, we would open a reading laboratory.

The statement, "It is not the function of the post high school institution to teach reading.", there was a variation in strength of response, even though they moved in the same direction. 78% of the reading specialists strongly disagreed. Only 56% of the deans disagreed strongly, but 38% disagreed. 19% of the reading specialists disagreed, 2% agreed and 2% strongly agreed.

Table 7

Reading Specialists		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
2%	Strongly Agree	2%	2%	3%
2%	Agree	4%	2%	3%
19%	Disagree	38%	30%	25%
78%	Strongly Disagree	56%	67.8%	65%

It is not the function of a post high school institution to teach reading.

Four percent of the deans agreed that reading shouldn't be taught on the college level and two percent strongly agreed that it should not.

The last question dealing with the existance of reading programs in colleges dealt with study skills. The statement was, "Study skills should be taught to all students in our college." 40% of the reading people strongly agreed, 42% agreed and only 18% disagreed. 21% of the deans disagreed, 46% agreed and 33% strongly agreed. This indicates that the lack of study skills has shown itself to both deans and specialists. There should be some more research in this area to capsule the kinds of study programs needed. There has been little research on study skills for technical school subjects.

Table 8

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
20%	Strongly Agree	33%	36%	36%
42%	Agree	46%	44%	39%
18%	Disagree	20%	19.5%	23%
0	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0

Study skills should be taught to all students in our college.

The position of the reading specialist in two-year technical colleges appears to be secure at the moment. The statement, "So far as raises, increments and travel are concerned, I believe that the reading specialist should be on the same status level as other members of the faculty." There was overwhelming agreement by reading specialists and deans.

Table 9

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
57%	Strongly Agree	62%	59.5%	59.8%
32%	Agree	34%	33%	31%
4.5%	Disagree	4%	4%	0
6%	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0

So far as raises, increments and travel are concerned, I believe that the reading specialist should be on the same status level as other members of the faculty.

One of the reading specialists who responded to this question with this statement. "Because of the rapid rate of change in our field, I believe that the reading specialist should have more travel than other faculty members." This is an interesting observation.

The query, "I believe that if the reading specialist position, as it now stands, were to cease to exist it would not affect our college greatly." 36% of the deans strongly disagreed, 48% disagreed and 16% agreed. 38% of the reading people strongly disagreed, 40% disagreed but 20% of the reading specialists agreed - if their job were to disappear it would not matter. This is a frightening thought. The reason? That cannont be determined from this sampling. However, more work needs to be done to ascertain why. If human behavior is any indication, when one feels his job is superfluous, he changes professions.

Table 10

Reading Specialists		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
7%	Strongly Agree	2%	5%	0
14%	Agree	14%	14%	13%
40%	Disagree	48%	44%	36.6%
38%	Strongly Disagree	36%	37%	40%

I believe that if the reading specialist position, as it now stands, were to cease to exist it would not affect our college greatly.

In so far as the statement, "The reading specialist is a highly qualified individual who offers supportive services related to reading to faculty and students.", all reading specialists agreed and only 6% of the deans disagreed.

Table 11

Reading Specialist		Deans	RMS[1]	RMS[2]
61%	Strongly Agree	56%	58.5%	61.2%
39%	Agree	39%	39%	34.5%
0	Disagree	6%	0	0
0	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0

The reading specialist is a highly qualified individual who offers supportive services related to reading to faculty and students.

Zimmerman believes that college administrators are largely indifferent to college reading programs. (Ref. 5) The results of this study do not find this to be the case. What is evident, however, is that there are some disagreements in so far as role and status that need to be resolved. More communication needs to take place between deans and their reading professions. Each has a different viewpoint, but those viewpoints are valid and should be understood. College Reading can become a meaningful part of the curriculum or it can cease to exist.

Further research needs to be done, to ascertain student need in comparison with services available. Training for the reading specialists should become so specialized that the reading and remediation would stand on its own, rather than being ignominiously attached to whatever department or division happened by.

More importantly, new and innovative approached to remediation must be developed. We must be developed. We must become a product - oriented profession - we must show results in tangible reading gains and higher GPA. The challenge is here.

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